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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000319

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/PASCUAL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: PALESTINIANS SEEK USG INTERVENTION TO SAVE 88
HOUSES IN SILWAN

REF: 08 JERUSALEM 2264

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The municipality of Jerusalem has reissued existing demolition orders for 88 Palestinian homes in the al-Bustan area of East Jerusalem's Silwan neighborhood. An attorney representing many of the home owners appealed for USG intervention to stop the demolitions. A representative of the NGO Ir Amim said the demolitions will allow the settler organization Elad to turn the area into an archeological park. A Jerusalem City Council member said the homes were built illegally and probably will be demolished, and that the residents rejected an offer of relocation to other areas of East Jerusalem. End summary.

PALESTINIANS REQUEST USG INTERVENTION TO PREVENT
CONTROVERSIAL EAST JERUSALEM HOME DEMOLITIONS

¶2. (SBU) Jerusalem attorney Ziad Kavar told PolOff February 23 that the Jerusalem Municipality is moving forward with plans to demolish at least 88 homes in the al-Bustan area of East Jerusalem's Silwan neighborhood. Kavar, who represents several al-Bustan residents said his clients own the land, but, because the GOI has designated the area a "green" zone, construction is illegal. He said the GOI Interior Ministry on February 17 rejected a rezoning plan developed by the residents of al-Bustan that would help legalize their homes. Municipal inspectors on February 22 surveyed the area in preparation for demolitions, Kavar said, adding that his efforts in court so far have failed to repeal the orders. He requested USG intervention, saying that only American pressure on the GOI will change the current plan.

¶3. (SBU) Sarah Kreimer, of the Jerusalem-based NGO Ir Amim, told PolOff February 18 that the al-Bustan demolitions will allow expansion of the City of David archeological park (reftel). She said the settler organization Elad, which runs the archeological park, plans to excavate the area and incorporate it into the park. She said the demolitions will displace current residents and reinforce the Palestinian perception that the GoI is not dealing with Palestinians in good faith.

JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY SAYS LAW, NOT
POLITICS, WILL DETERMINE DEMOLITIONS

¶4. (SBU) Yakir Segev, Jerusalem City Council member responsible for East Jerusalem Affairs, told PolOff February 23 that the al-Bustan area is an important archeological site and, according to Israeli law, should be open space. He downplayed any political aspect to the decision, saying the issue is one for the courts. Segev told PolOff that he met with the residents of al-Bustan to discuss alternative solutions -- such as relocating the residents to other areas of East Jerusalem -- but that they were not receptive.

PLO CALLS FOR GENERAL STRIKE;
PA ANNOUNCES TOUR OF AREA FOR PRESS, DIPLOMATS

15. (U) PLO Secretary General Yasir 'Abd Rabbo announced a general strike on February 28 throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem in protest of the impending demolitions in al-Bustan. PA President Mahmoud Abbas' office called the GOI's actions in al-Bustan a move towards "mass population transfer," and announced that high-level diplomatic pressure would be brought on the UN, EU, and USG to win their support for preventing the demolitions. The President's office will lead a tour for diplomats and hold a press conference in al-Bustan on February 24.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) The Silwan neighborhood is a Palestinian area of East Jerusalem that has experienced a growing Israeli presence over the past few years. The neighborhood contains archeological sites associated with an historical Jewish presence in the area. Home demolitions in this area would provoke strong Palestinian reaction. This issue has led Palestinian press for several days. Demolitions of 88 al-Bustan homes would also constitute a powerful "fact on the ground," unilaterally removing a Palestinian population in a sensitive area of Jerusalem adjacent to the Old City.

BACKGROUND

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17. (U) Following Israel's 1967 occupation of East Jerusalem, GoI authorities devised new town plans for the area surrounding the Old City, a key element of which was the designation of the area outside the Old City walls as open public land. In the intervening years, scores of Palestinian homes were constructed without building permits in the open land of the al-Bustan area of Silwan. In November 2004, then-City Engineer Uri Shitreet ordered the clearing of the Palestinian homes from al-Bustan. Palestinian residents appealed to the Israeli Attorney General. Largely due to international pressure, then-Mayor Uri Lupolianski suspended the demolitions and allowed the residents to present an alternative neighborhood plan.

WALLES